

Message Text

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TAGS: SOPN, PINT, SA, EG

SUBJECT: SAUDI PAPER CRITICIZES EGYPT'S REFERENDUM

1. MAY 22 ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SAUDI GAZETTE CARRIED EDITORIAL CRITIZING EGYPTIAN REFERENDUM IN TERMS WHICH SAUDI PRESS RARELY USES IN COMMENTING ON EVENTS IN OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES. OTHER PAPERS, ENGLISH AND ARABIC, RESTRICTED SELVES TO STRAIGHT REPORTING OF REFERENDUM AND MADE NO EDITORIAL COMMENT POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE.

2. EDITORIAL NOTES THAT APPROVAL OF REFERENDUM MEANS APPROVAL OF GENERALLY STATED PRINCIPLES WHICH WILL THEN BECOME BASES FOR DRAFTING REGULATIONS FOR EGYPTIAN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO REGULATE POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN COUNTRY. WRITER ASKS RHETORICALLY, "WHY IS THIS NECESSARY?" AND SUGGESTS THAT PREFERABLE ACTION WAS TO ALLOW ELECTORAL PROCESS TO DEAL WITH DANGERS OF REVIVED REIGHTIST AND LEFTIST ACRIVITY.

3. EDITORIAL SUGGESTS THAT A FREE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION WOULD HAVE ALLOWED "A PROCESS OF ELIMINATION TO TAKE PLACE AND WOULD HAVE GIVEN THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT IN EGYPT AN ADDED DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE." FURTHERMORE, SUCH A POPULAR ELECTION, THE WRITER ADDS, " COULD HAVE ALSO

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GIVEN PRESIDENT SADAT AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEASURE ACTUAL POPULAR SUPPORT FOR HIS POLICIES TOWARDS ISRAEL."

4. THE EDITORIAL ALSO NOTES THAT "EVEN IF ONE CONSIDERS THE REFERENDUM AS AN ACCEPTABLE WAY TO GO ABOUT THINGS, THE OPEN AND MASSIVE CAMPAIGN BY THE GOVERNMENT TO GET AN OVERWHELMING YES VOTE WILL STILL REMAIN QUESTIONABLE."

5. COMMENT: EDITORIAL, WRITTEN BY BRITISH-TRAINED SAUDI JOURNALIST AYAD MADANI, INCLUDES IDEAS CHARACTERISTIC OF WESTERN DEMOCRATIC THEORY WHICH ARE NOT OFTEN EXPRESSED CLEARLY AND OPENLY IN SAUDI ARABIA. WE WOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED ANY SAUDI PAPER TO SAY THAT:

(A) ELECTORAL PROCESS IS EFFECTIVE WAY TO REDUCE INFLUENCE OF POLITICALLY HARMFUL GROUPS.

(B) POPULAR SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT SADAT'S POLICY TOWARD ISRAEL CAN (AND SHOULD) BE MEASURED IN POPULAR ELECTION.

(C) THERE MAY HAVE BEEN QUESTIONABLE PRACTICES IN EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENTS HOLDING OF REFERENDUM.

6. SAUDI PRESS GENERALLY AVOIDS CRITICISM OF OTHER ARAB STATES AND SPECIFICALLY AVOIDS NEGATIVE COMMENTARY ON THEIR DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. WHEN CRITICISM IS EXPRESSED IT IS PUT IN CONVOLUTED OR ALLEGORICAL TERMINOLOGY REFERRING TO TRADITIONS OF PROPHET AND EARLY ALIPHS. ALTHOUGH SAUDI AUTHORITIES MAY BE MORE TOLERANT OF UNORTHODOX OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PAPER WITH SMALL CIRCULATION, MADANI IS STILL PROBABLY TESTING UNWRITTEN CODE OF CONDUCT FOR SAUDI PRESS AND DEGREE OF GOVERNMENTS TOLERANCE

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ANCE FOR ADVOCACY OF DEMOCRATIC IDEAS IN ANY CONTEXT. ALTHOUGH IT MAY SEEM PARADOXICAL FOR SAUDI PAPER TO CRITICIZE EGYPT FOR VIOLATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESS, IN REALITY EDITORIAL MAY BE TAKING OPPORTUNITY OF COMMENTING ON EGYPTIAN REFERENDUM TO MAKE INDIRECT APPEAL FOR DEMOCRATIZATION OF SAUDI POLITICS.

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